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SUBJECT: PRISON BRAWL REVEALS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, DISCOMFORT WITH  
NEWCOMERS

Ref: Nicosia 434

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Turf battles over drug dealing morphed into open rioting May 8 at a prison in north Nicosia. Unable to suppress the fighting, penitentiary leadership summoned for assistance "TRNC" riot police, who ended the conflict quickly. Soon afterwards, however, media alleged that police and prison guards had employed brutal tactics to quell the disturbance. Additionally, journalists revealed that the north's only prison was grossly overcrowded, housing three times as many inmates as it could humanely contain. Most were mainland Turks, many illegal, spawning further navel-gazing that Turkish Cypriots were "losing their island" to the mostly poor, often illiterate, and prone to violence newcomers from Anatolia. While the jailhouse riot and subsequent media firestorm over prison demographics raised awareness over the still-uncontrolled flow of migrants from the mainland, we doubt the "TRNC" will implement tougher restrictions anytime soon. END SUMMARY.

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RIOTING UNCOVERS VIOLENCE, FILTH  
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12. (U) As in many penitentiaries, drugs flow freely at the "TRNC Central Prison" in north Nicosia, the north's sole correctional facility. A dispute among rival dealers sparked violence May 8, with fights breaking out between 30-odd inmates. Prison staff, quickly determining they lacked the means to respond effectively, called in "TRNC" riot police to put down the fighting and restore order, which they quickly did. A subsequent search of prison grounds uncovered a considerable number of inmate-produced weapons and a variety of illegal substances.

13. (U) Factual media reporting of the incident quickly turned into scathing criticism of the brutal methods employed, however. Police allegedly had targeted not only rioters, but the general prison population, subjecting scores to truncheon blows. The Turkish Cypriot Doctors Association (TCDA) obtained permission from the "Ministry of Interior" to enter the prison and examine inmates. Of a random sample of 60 prisoners, 50 had heavy bruising on their legs, consistent with blows from truncheons.

14. (U) TCDA also criticized prison living standards, focusing on overcrowding. "Official" figures state that over 450 inmates fill the 180-capacity prison; some journalists close to the "government" put the true number at 750. Thirty inmates or more were sharing a single commode, TCDA claimed, and showers were similarly scarce. Security experts, too, were appalled by conditions within the "TRNC" facility. Not only were the guards and wardens hard-pressed to control the overwhelming number of prisoners in such a small prison, but there were no closed circuit TV cameras or any other high-tech security/surveillance technologies employed there.

15. (U) Other pundits highlighted equally grave problems with the north's incarceration regime. Convicted criminals shared space with detainees awaiting trial and unable to afford bail, for example, a practice outlawed in many countries. Violent criminals and

non-violent offenders were housed jointly. And in at least one area of the prison, men, women, and legal minors served time in close confines.

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AUTHORITIES QUICK TO PASS BUCK  
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¶6. (SBU) Media criticism sent "TRNC" leadership immediately into spin control over the handling of the riot. The "MoI" cited overcrowding for prison authorities' inability to contain the violence, seemingly ignorant they had any role in generating said conditions. Also to blame for the excessively violent reprisal, the "Minister" continued, was the "government's" inability to manage the police, who, under Article 10 of the Turkish Cypriot "Constitution," temporarily fall under the command of Turkish security forces.

¶7. (SBU) It was prison demographics, however, that would soon dominate discourse in the T/C community. "Government" authorities argued that Turkish Cypriots constituted only 30 percent of the prisoner population, the remainder being foreigners, predominantly Turks. Most of the latter were not the "settlers" so widely denigrated in the south, but Anatolian "tourists" -- temporary migrants seeking work, really -- who continued to arrive in great numbers.

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Natural to Blame the Other  
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¶8. (SBU) Even before the May 8 riot, many in the Turkish Cypriot-administered area were attributing the increasing crime rate to foreigners, mostly Turks. A day rarely went by, for example, without media reports of Turkish "tourists" being arrested at Kyrenia or Famagusta ports for carrying narcotics. Incidents of

NICOSIA 00000456 002 OF 002

rape, theft, and murder have increased as well, editorialists alleged. Turkish Cypriot dailies now devote several pages daily to criminal news, and they rarely lack for input.

¶9. (SBU) The north Nicosia prison had been spacious enough for the local prisoner population and mostly calm for decades, T/C media and opinion leaders argued. Further, the Turkish Cypriots currently housed there would fill less than half the facility. Rather than building a new prison to accommodate the burgeoning inmate populations, the "government" has reacted by announcing its intention to speed implementation of the Felon Expatriation Agreement recently signed with Turkey. Only then would overcrowding be truly overcome and prison conditions improved, a spokesman asserted.

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Turkish Cypriots, Settlers, and Migrants  
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¶10. (SBU) According to the recent "TRNC census," individuals born in Turkey represent nearly half of the T/C-administered area's de facto population (Reftel). Social conflict between this segment and native-born Turkish Cypriots would seem natural, and does in fact occur. But the public row over the prison riot highlights a different demographic fissure in northern Cyprus. T/Cs directed their wrath not towards mainland Turks as a whole, but to the uneducated and poor Turkish "tourists" whose numbers, despite tougher "TRNC migration legislation" passed last year, continue to grow. While these Anatolians might be filling jobs that neither T/Cs nor long-term Turkish residents will accept, they also have brought rising criminality, drug use, violence against women, and other social ills, the prevailing theory here goes.

¶11. (SBU) Many Turkish Cypriots are demanding the "government" take drastic measures to staunch the flow of Turkish nationals to the island. "Those here must go, and no more must be allowed to enter," shouted "Kibrisli" newspaper recently, ironically plagiarizing language most Greek Cypriots use when referring to all ethnic Turks who have arrived in Cyprus post-1974. With jam-packed ferries from

the mainland continuing to arrive daily, however, Kibrisli's campaign looks daunting.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (SBU) Despite the public's clamor for implementation of a more restrictive migratory system, we don't expect major changes soon, prison rioting or not. Revisions undoubtedly would prove politically divisive, with T/C nationalists, who historically have benefited from mainlanders' votes, opposing the measures stridently.

And while the "governing" CTP plausibly might benefit from a crackdown, winning electoral support for its "get tough on illegal immigration" stand, we doubt it would risk a fight with the right wing -- and Ankara -- on this potentially incendiary issue.

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